The Boston Globe — Monday, December 25, 1967

...e Call...A Choking Sound.

...A Meeting With Philby

[redacted]

Original filed under [redacted]

EDITOR'S NOTE — During the past few weeks, there have been persistent rumors that the "memoirs" of the Soviet spy Kim Philby are about to be published in the West. Philby appears to have made a number of contacts with western intelligence organizations, and there is also evidence that the manuscript has been pushed by official Russian sources.

Recently, the London Sunday Times was offered the chance to publish an 80,000-word manuscript by Philby. After consideration, the Sunday Times decided it could not justify such a step. The question of financial reward was not the decisive one — Philby made it clear that he was not interested in money for himself. It was rather a matter that memoirs from this admitted KGB (The Soviet Committee for State Security) officer, could only be a deliberate attempt to damage Western interests, including Western intelligence organizations.

However, the London Sunday Times did take steps to ascertain what sort of manuscript Philby was offering. It turns out to be not simply his memoirs — but rather an indictment of western secret operations against the Soviet Union, 1945-55.

Two weeks ago, Sunday Times reporter Murray Sayle was in Moscow on a scientific feature assignment for the Sunday Times Magazine. Philby met Sayle several times. During these meetings, Philby made the remarkable suggestion that he might withdraw his book if the Soviet spies Peter and Helen Kroger were exchanged for Gerald Brooke. The Krogers were sentenced in Britain in March, 1961, to 20 years for espionage. Brooke was sentenced in July, 1965, to a year's imprisonment and four years in a labor camp. Suggestions of an exchange have been steadfastly refused by the British government. The following is Sayle's report of his meetings with Philby).

By MURRAY SAYLE
The London Times

My first direct contact with Philby was a telephone call to my room at the Leningradskaya Hotel in Moscow, one of those marvellously ugly wedding-cake buildings in the Stalin Gothic style of the '50s.

I picked up the telephone and heard a strange choking sound, as if someone at the other end was trying to say something. Then the unknown caller hung up. The same thing happened five minutes later — a ring, the same sound, a click and silence. The third time, I picked up the telephone and said, on the off-chance, "Mr. Philby?" "Speaking!" said Philby, quite distinctly this time, and after a few seconds' preliminaries, we arranged to meet in Room 436 at the Minsk Hotel on Gorky Boulevard (the "Broadway of Moscow"), at 8 o'clock the same night.

I knocked, the door opened, and there was Philby, smiling with hand outstretched. I went in and took off my snow-powdered hat, and coat. The room was completely bare except for two chairs and a table on which stood a briefcase, a bottle of vodka and two glasses. The table stood by a window with a breathtaking view over Moscow, red stars shining on the ghostly white walls and spires of the Kremlin in the distance.

"This is a tough, dynamic city," said Philby. "This society is going somewhere. Care for a drink?"

I accepted his offer and we sat down. Philby was dressed in sports coat and grey flannels; he is a courteous man, smiles a great deal, and his well-cut grey hair and ruddy complexion suggest vitality and enjoyment of life. He speaks exactly as a senior British civil servant would about his present employers — "my superiors" he says, "my colleagues," and very early in our conversation he explained, "I am a serving officer of the KGB, as you probably know." He made no secret of his KGB employment and told me at one stage he had been on the telephone with his employers.

After Philby said that he worked for the KGB .I took the opportunity to make my position clear: I did not propose to conduct a formal interview in the sense of asking him a set of questions but that I held myself free to write an account of our meeting at some subsequent time; and that I did not think there was any point in our debating the merits or otherwise of communism, or in my offering him any comments on the career he had chosen. He said in reply that he would assume that it was possible that I worked for some Western intelligence service. (He subsequently said: "I naturally took precautions against any rough stuff — you would not have got 10 yards down the street.") But he seemed, at the time, quite relaxed.

We met subsequently at a number of restaurants nominated by Philby. During these long Russian meals vodka, wine and brandy flowed freely, and Philby talked lengthily, even compulsively. He is clearly a sociable type of drinker and he seems to have an iron head; I could detect no change in his alertness or joviality as the waiters arrived with relays of 300 grams of vodka or 600 grams of Armenian brandy.

The conversations which follow took place in no particular order, and I present them without further comment of my own.

★

GERALD BROOKE AND THE KROGERS: Philby raised this subject himself, spontaneously. "There was an interesting suggestion in The Economist," he said. "The idea was that I would be prepared to withdraw my manuscript if the Krogers were exchanged for Brooke. If that were in fact a condition of the Krogers being released, of course I would withdraw my book."

I asked, "is that a message for someone? Do you want that passed on?" Philby replied: "No, it was just an idea I had." I asked: "Why are you so anxious to make this exchange with the Krogers?"

PHILBY: "Our position is that the Krogers are innocent of the charges on which they were convicted. They were personal, not political friends of Gordon Lonsdale. We don't dispute that people like Gordon and Col Abel were our agents, highly skilled professionals, but we cannot agree that the Krogers were the top-level agents they are being represented as, or indeed our agents at all except in the sense of being friends of Lonsdale's."

I asked, "did you write Lonsdale's memoirs?"

PHILBY: "Gordon is a very talented fellow but he is no literary man. I looked over his manuscript." Continuing on the Krogers, he said: "We hear that they are deteriorating in prison. Kroger, we are informed, is covered in eczema. The conditions they are being held under are inhumanly severe."

I said, "I suppose a very close eye is being kept on them after Blake's escape."

PHILBY: "Perhaps in any event, we consider his exchange could well take place. Now, look at the other side. It's a pity about Brooke, he really was a silly fellow. He got involved with the NTS (The "People's Labor Front," a venerable Russian refugee organiza-

ti...) and then gave him a list of people to contact who were supposed to be working inside the Soviet Union. We have penetrated what is left on the NTS so thoroughly that the very first person he contacted was a KGB man. All this came out at Brooke's trial and is well known in the West."

I said, "there seems to be a feeling in the West that Brooke was more or less innocently handing out anti-Communist literature and was grabbed by your people in order to exchange him off for the Krogers."

PHILBY: "Well, check it out with any of your Russian-speaking colleagues here in Moscow." (I did: Philby's version of Brooke's activities seemed to be square with the reports of people who attended his trial.)

PHILBY continued: "Now the N.T.S. really belongs to the (U.S.) Central Intelligence Agency . . . it was handed over to the CIA some time in 1950. I ought to know—it was me who handed it over. This certainly makes Brooke some sort of western agent, doesn't it? It's up to you and the Americans to decide who wants him back."

I said: 'Are you helping things along by ill-treating Brooke, as you are reported to be doing in the West?"

PHILBY: "In the first place Brooke is our prisoner and we are treating him in accordance with Soviet laws, not your laws. He is being treated like any other prisoner would be in his position. After all, he is in prison. You don't expect to get all this (indicating a table spread with vodka, caviar and wine) in prison. Prisons tend to be unpleasant places. That's why I always took good care to keep out."

I asked, "does this suggestion that you would withdraw your book if the Krogers were exchanged come from your superiors?"

PHILBY: "No, it is my own idea. I feel I would like to do whatever I can personally to get these people out. Perhaps two for one seems a bad bargain in the West, but we will just have to face the fact that the Western side always comes out worse in this type of exchange, for the simple reason that we have more, and better agents than you have. We get Col Abel, a first-class man, for Gary Powers, who was only a pilot, for the simple reason that you have no one as good over here for us to catch."

★

HIMSELF: "I love life, women and children, food and drink, I love all that and I want other people to be able to enjoy it all to the full, too," said Philby. I asked him how he felt about leaving his own family. "I suppose I am really two people," he said. "I am a private person and a political person. Of course, if there is a conflict, the political person comes first." I said this sounded one of the bleakest, saddest things I had heard anyone say for a long time. He shrugged his shoulders. I asked how he reacted to the charge that he was a traitor. "To betray, you must first belong," he said. "I never belonged. I have followed exactly the same line the whole of my adult life. The fight against fascism and the fight against imperialism were, fundamentally, the same fight."

★

DANIEL AND SINYAVSKY, THE IMPRISONED WRITERS: "I was completely against it, I thought the whole thing was a regrettable reversion to the old spirit. Of course, they were guilty as charged, smuggling their criticism of the Soviet Union abroad to be published. They should have got a week in jail, or perhaps a public censure from their colleagues in the Writers' Union. What's the point of sending them to a labor camp? But you have to make some allowances for what these Russians have been through at the hands of foreign invaders — they're sensitive on the area of their own people getting involved with foreigners. You can understand even if you don't agree. The old spirit survives here and there, but you'll have to admit these sentences were against the whole direction things have been taking here."

★

HIS BOOK: "My book is about 80,000 words long. No more than eight pages are political, in the sense of discussing the merits of Communism. Of course, many young people became Communists in the early '30s: The question, in my case is why I remained one, and saw it through to the end, through the Stalin period and everything else. I make my position clear on these matters. The main part of my book is an account of my work with the SIS, CIA and FBI in my years in the West. I name the colleagues I was involved with, but not in an unkindly way, I hope: Just setting down the facts. I think the truth should come out."

I said: "Your superiors must think this publication will help the Soviet side."

PHILBY: "Of course: I am a serving officer of the KGB. Naturally, I say nothing about my work for the KGB in my book, and my history becomes rather general after about 1955—I have to think about protecting our own operations after that date."

★

THE KGB: "Undoubtedly ours is the best intelligence service there has ever been. Some really tremendous triumphs. We have of course many advantages . . . We have a tradition of foresight and patience laid down by that brilliant man Feliks Dzerzinsky (who founded the Cheka, forerunner of the KBG). When I first started to work for the Soviet Union, for example, I used to meet my contact once a week for two whole years when absolutely nothing happened at all. We were patiently waiting for an opportunity."

★

AFRICA: "One of the happiest days of my life was the fall of Kwame Nkrumah—not that I have anything against the poor chap personally, but I think we made some serious mistakes there.

"I was asked to write a paper on the African situation generally soon after I arrived in Moscow—one of my first jobs for the K.G.B. here, as a matter of fact. I took a generally cautious line. By all means give these new African states a reasonable amount of financial aid on real projects. But I warned, don't get deeply involved . . . well, we did. Millions of rubles down the drain. I was sorry to see Nkrumah followed by the people who are in there now, but at any rate I was proved right. Our policy in Africa now is watch, help but no deep involvements. Incidentally, the Chinese seem to have done even worse than we did."

★